National Ingratitude:

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A SERMON

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Preached DECEMBER 12. 1776,

Being the Day appointed by the KING for a General Faſt in SCOTLAND.

By JAMES FORD, A. M.

Miniſter of the Goſpel in LAUDER.

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NATIONAL INGRATITUDE:

A SERMON.

ISAIAH i. 2.

Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: For the LORD *hath ſpoken, I have nouriſhed and brought up children, and they have rebelled againſt me.*

IT was reaſonable to expect that the Almighty would intereſt himſelf in a ruined world, that he would not forſake the work of his own hands, but interpoſe for their relief.

Among the various methods too by which he reveals his will, it is natural to think that he would make uſe of the miniſtry of men: men clothed with a divine commiſſion, and endowed with heavenly qualifications for that purpoſe. The prophet Iſaiah was of the moſt eminent among the prophets: he is commonly ſtiled, the *Evangelic Prophet*, becauſe he diſcour-

ſes at large concerning the Divine Saviour, and the unſpeakable bleſſings that would accrue to mankind from his kingdom.

Our text contains a complaint againſt the nation and church of the Jews; and both worlds are called upon to atteſt the juſtneſs of it: and it is hoped the words will be found highly ſuitable to the deſign of this day.

We ſhall *firſt* conſider the complaint as applicable to the Jews. We ſhall, in the *next* place, conſider it as applicable to ourſelves; and then make a ſhort improvement.

I. The Jews were under a theocracy, as indeed all nations are, though not in the viſible and miraculous manner that they were. God himſelf was the founder of that nation, and he took them under his own immediate government and protection. He brought them into a ſtate of bondage in Egypt, in order to diſplay his divine power and majeſty in their deliverance; and accordingly he brought them out of that bondage with a ſtrong hand and an outſtretched arm. He ſupported them by miracle in the wilderneſs for forty years; and, when ſettled in the land of Canaan,

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Canaan, he protected them againſt their ſtrong and numerous enemies. He gave them a ſyſtem of religious inſtitutions, adapted to the guilty ſtate of human nature, and which were typical of that great Deliverer who was to come in the fullneſs of time. He gave them alſo a ſyſtem of civil policy, adapted to their ſituation as a people ſequeſtered from the reſt of mankind; a ſyſtem founded upon the ſtricteſt juſtice and propriety: ſo much ſo, that many civilized nations have conſidered it as a model, as far as their circumſtances would make it practicable.

But what is amazing! this fabric was built at once by the hand of God, and the miniſtry of one man: and this we muſt conſider as one of the many irrefragable evidences of the divine authority of the Old Teſtament. In ſhort, the Almighty deſigned them to be a holy nation, a royal prieſthood, and a peculiar people; to bear teſtimony to the true God, and to be the depoſitary of divine truth till the coming of Chriſt, whilſt the world about them was over-run with ignorance, ſuperſtition, and idolatry. And we ſee from their hiſtory, that ſo long as they followed the direction

of heaven, all went proſperouſly with them: but whenever they forſook God, he alſo forſook them. Amidſt all the advantages they enjoyed, they rebelled againſt God, they inclined to idolatry, and the moſt enormous and heaven-daring crimes were practiſed among them. Often did the Almighty chaſtiſe them by war, famine, and peſtilence; and by a ſeventy year's captivity in Babylon, till at laſt they reſiſted the Saviour of the world, put him to death upon a croſs, oppoſed the preaching of his apoſtles; when the meaſure of their iniquity became full, and the Almighty ſent the Roman legions among them to deſtroy their nation and temple, and made them monuments of God's righteous diſpleaſure againſt ſinful nations to future ages. They have now been in a diſperſed ſtate theſe ſeventeen hundred years; but, we hope, they are reſerved to be monuments of his grace and mercy in ſome future age, when it ſhall pleaſe God to bring back the captivity of Jacob; when he will pour upon the houſe of David and the inhabitants of Jeruſalem the Spirit of grace and of ſupplications; when they ſhall look upon him whom they have pierced, and mourn.

This

This account of the Jews may be conſidered as a model of God's tranſactions with other nations, and eſpecially thoſe whom he has highly favoured: Our own eſpecially, to whom he has given his ſtatutes and his judgments, in a more clear and comfortable manner than he hath done to any other; Great Britain, the habitation of divine truth, and the habitation of human liberty!

II. And this leads me to conſider this complaint as applicable to ourſelves.

To give a detail of the great lines of God's providence to this nation would greatly exceed the limits of this diſcourſe. Let it ſuffice to obſerve, that we were enlightened with the goſpel of Chriſt in the very infancy of Chriſtianity. The Roman legions came among us to conquer us in their view to the empire, but in the view of the Almighty, to conquer us to Chriſt. Many of theſe Romans were diſciples of the Divine Saviour; and their abode here ſowed the ſeeds of Chriſtianity among us: It ſoon opened a correſpondence between Great Britain and the land of [redacted]; and the conſequence was, that the divine light of the goſpel did early ſhine upon this iſland.

In

In proceſs of time, this divine religion became obſcured by the ſuperſtition and idolatry of Rome: but, along with other nations of Europe, we were reſcued from this Antichriſtian darkneſs by the bleſſed reformation; and God has many times preſerved us from being reduced under that dreadful yoke, a yoke which neither we nor our fathers could bear. Many of our predeceſſors did feel the iron teeth of that religion, when theſe corrupters of religion did boaſt, that they bound our kings with chains, and our nobles with links of iron.

But now, bleſſed be God, no nation under heaven can boaſt of our high privileges; for we ſit every one of us under our vine, and under our fig-tree, and none to make us afraid. But, alas! what fruit has all this produced? May not the Almighty complain of us, in the words of our text, "I have nouriſhed and brought up chil-"dren, and they have rebelled againſt "me?"

Strange to think! that, in this enlightened age, impiety and infidelity ſhould become faſhionable—that luxury, in all its branches, ſhould become a ſtudy—that ſe-

rioufneſs

rioufneſs and practical religion ſhould be laughed out of company—and that vice ſhould appear in triumph, deſtroying, like the peſtilence, at noon-day *. Is it not natural to expect, in this caſe, that the Divine Arbiter of human affairs ſhould put a mark of his diſpleaſure upon us? And, indeed, what other conſtruction can we put upon that dangerous and unhappy war in which we are engaged with our American colonies?

It cannot be expected, in a diſcourſe of this nature, that we ſhould ſtate the caſe between Great Britain and America at full length: but, at ſame time, I ſhould conſider myſelf as unworthy to appear here upon this occaſion, if I did not bear teſtimony againſt the conduct of our brethren in America. Bad and criminal as we are in the ſight of God, we may juſtly complain of them, in the words of our text—"We "have nouriſhed and brought up children, "and they have rebelled againſt us."

* To be convinced of the juſtice of this charge, I muſt refer you to an excellent pamphlet, Britain's Remembrancer, publiſhed after the Rebellion, 1745, where that ſenſible writer makes it appear, that thoſe vices which brought ruin upon empires and kingdoms in former ages, have come to an amazing height in the Britiſh empire. What then muſt be the conſequence!

It

It is not many years ſince theſe colonies were upon the brink of becoming a province of France: they cried aloud to us for aſſiſtance; we flew to their relief; and, by the bleſſing of God upon our arms, and by the conduct and intrepidity of our valiant commanders, the fate of North America was decided upon the heights of Quebec. Our expence of blood and treaſure then and formerly, upon their account, is not eaſy to be reckoned. The national debt of Great Britain is immenſe; and had not the Mother Country a natural claim upon theſe now flouriſhing colonies, to take ſhare of the burthen? It is aſked—it is refuſed—they rebel—they fly to arms, and they ſeek the deſtruction of the Britiſh empire. Oh America! ungrateful America!—"We "have indeed nouriſhed and brought up "children, and they have rebelled againſt us." And can there be higher proof of it than now, that they are, by an agent, ſoliciting the aſſiſtance of that very power, out of whoſe hands we ſo lately delivered them?

In judging of this affair betwixt Great Britain and America, I would not form my opinion from the hot and daring ſpeeches of a ſelfiſh oppoſition; neither from the

principles

principles of a few captious writers, who have ſcrewed up their notions of liberty ſo high as to make them repugnant to the beſt ſyſtem of government. Tyranny and deſpotiſm are indeed the ſcourge of mankind; but a licentious and ungovernable ſpirit is no leſs ſo. Whether the people in America were more happy when under the Britiſh government than ſince they fell under the tyranny of a Congreſs, many thouſands in that country are ready to atteſt. Liberty and independency were at firſt echoed from all quarters; but now we hear—Welcome, Howe! come with ſpeed to Philadelphia, and deliver us!

The Britiſh government, from the nature of its conſtitution now, will be in little danger of oppreſſing its ſubjects beyond what is abſolutely neceſſary. This would endanger the conſtitution itſelf, which is founded upon principles of liberty. It may commit miſtakes; but when once theſe miſtakes are obſerved and felt, Government muſt and will rectify them, for its own ſecurity. Had our brethren in America conducted themſelves as good ſubjects of Great Britain, had they ſtudied their own intereſt, and that of the mother coun-

try, they would have yielded to the tax for a ſeaſon, and remonſtrated againſt it, not with arms, but with reaſon. But, in place of doing ſo, they appeared fond of the opportunity, and were keen to bring about this long-intended revolution; and, from the very beginning of this affair, a wrathful and furious ſpirit hath appeared in all their motions. Their marking out our officers with rifle guns—their barbarous and inhuman uſe of the tar and feathers upon ſuch as refuſed to join in their mad rebellion—their bloody proceedings againſt ſuch as refuſed their paper-money—their deſtroying of light-houſes, their burning of towns—their repeated application to foreign powers, and the general offer of their trade to all Europe, excluſive of Great Britain:—Are not theſe the effects of a moſt vindictive ſpirit, the dictates of a wild enthuſiaſm, and altogether incompatible with the principles of true proteſtants?

Amidſt this ſcene of diſtraction too, they are bold enough to appeal the juſtneſs of their cauſe to Heaven; and ſo have the moſt licentious rebels in all ages. But where is that fear of God, and where is

that regard to the ſpirit and genius of the goſpel, which alone can entitle them to make this appeal? They ſeem to have forgotten too the conduct of the Chriſtian church, for the firſt three centuries, when it lived under the government of Heathen emperors. Human nature could not ſuffer greater hardſhips than the church endured during that period: But do we, at any time, diſcover that ſpirit among them which has ſhewn itſelf among our enlightened brethren in North America? It is true, the Chriſtians then were not embodied in a political ſenſe; they did not exiſt in a ſeparate ſtate; but were ſcattered through the empire. But when we conſider the injuſtice that was done them, and the dreadful ſeverities they endured, they might have defended and even avenged themſelves upon their enemies, if they had thought it conſiſtent with the principles of their divine faith. They were ſufficiently numerous in moſt parts of the empire to have done it; and they could eaſily have found proper hands to conduct them in the attempt. But theſe diſciples of the Divine Saviour acted a very different part from our brethren in America: they

lived

lived in love, peace, and concord among themſelves, and with others too, as far as was poſſible. They were good neighbours, good ſubjects, not enemies to Cæſar, nor railers againſt the rulers, though infidels and perſecutors. They prayed fervently for them; and though they would not pay them divine honours, yet they never refuſed them civil homage and ſubjection; neither did their preachers ever meddle with the politics of the times, or attempt to make parties and factions by declamations againſt the government. By the time that theſe things made their appearance in the church, the primitive glory of Chriſtianity was much defaced, and its power and influence were remarkably declined.

I would not be underſtood here to be pleading the cauſe of an indefeaſible right in kings, nor of paſſive obedience and non-reſiſtance in ſubjects: Theſe ſenſeleſs chimeras have long ſince been exploded theſe happy realms, and almoſt all Europe. What I would inſiſt for is, that ſubjects, but eſpecially the ſubjects of a mild and gracious government, ſhould be extremely cautious and tender of riſing in rebellion. Government muſt be a heavy bur-

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den to thoſe who have the management of it; they have a thouſand difficulties to encounter, that are known only to themſelves: and therefore, if, in place of leading quiet and peaceable lives under the beſt of princes, and the happieſt conſtitution, we go about to encounter danger where there is none; and, by ſo doing, endanger and bring the whole fabric to ruin, we go upon the abſurd maxim of loſing all rather than give a ſmall part. A liberty of this kind I do not underſtand; and I know no better way of convincing ſuch people of their miſtake, than by ſubjecting them for a ſhort time to the government of a Grand Signior, or of a Lewis XIV. or the government of an American Congreſs, which, I imagine, might be the worſt of all.

It is an eſtabliſhed maxim in all ſocieties, and in every age, that the different members, which compoſe a ſtate, muſt contribute towards all expences in proportion to their reſpective abilities. The ſecurity of the American Provinces requires ſuch a ſhare of aſſiſtance from them as may enable the Mother Country to protect them upon all occaſions. It was to deliver them

from

from a continued moleſtation that Britain did engage in a war that has multiplied her debts; they ought certainly then to aid her in bearing or leſſening the weight of that overcharge. At preſent, when they are freed of all apprehenſions from the attempts of a formidable enemy, which have been happily removed by the intervention of Great Britain, can they in juſtice refuſe their deliverer, when her neceſſities are preſſing, that money which purchaſed their preſervation? Has not that generous protector, for a conſiderable time, given encouragement to their rich productions? Has ſhe not laviſhed immenſe ſums, and does ſhe not ſtill laviſh them on lands not yet cleared? And do not ſuch benefits call aloud for a grateful return? Such were the motives that perſuaded the Britiſh goverment that they had a right to eſtabliſh taxation on the Colonies. And upon what principle, I would fain know, can either they or their miſtaken friends in this country go about to refuſe it?

Before our Colonies proceed farther in this political combuſtion, they ſhould recal to memory all the advantages they owe to their Mother Country. Britain has always been

been their barrier againſt the powerful nations in Europe; and it has ſerved as a guide and moderator to watch over their preſervation, and to heal thoſe civil diſſentions which jealouſy and rivalſhip have often excited between neighbouring plantations in a riſing ſtate. It is to the influence of our excellent conſtitution that they owe the peace and proſperity they enjoy. While the Colonies live under ſo ſalutary and mild an adminiſtration, they will continue to make a rapid progreſs in the vaſt field of improvement that opens itſelf to their view, and which their induſtry may extend to the remoteſt deſerts.

But, on the other hand, our Colonies ought to conſider what may be the direful conſequences of a rupture with Great Britain. They cannot embrace a plan of abſolute independence, without breaking through the ties of religion, oaths, laws, language, relation, intereſt, trade, and habit, which unite them together under the mild authority of the Mother Country. Is it to be imagined that ſuch an avulſion would not affect the heart, the vitals, and even the life of the Colonies? If they ſhould ſtop ſhort of the violence of civil

wars,

wars, would they eaſily be brought to agree upon a new form of government? If each ſettlement compoſed a diſtinct ſtate, what diviſions might enſue! We may judge of the animoſities that would ariſe from their ſeparation, by the fate of all communities which Nature has made to border upon each other. Could it be ſuppoſed, that ſo many ſettlements, where a diverſity of laws, different degrees of opulence, and variety of poſſeſſions, and jarring intereſts exiſt, would eaſily form themſelves into a laſting confederacy? How could they adjuſt the rank which each would aſpire to hold, and the influence it ought to have, in proportion to the riſk it incurred, and the forces it ſupplied? In ſhort, have they not the greateſt reaſon to fear that they would ſoon break, and become the inſtruments of bringing deſtruction upon each other? All theſe conſiderations ſeem to demonſtrate, that a total ſeparation from the Mother Country would prove the greateſt misfortune to the Britiſh Colonies *?

The powers of Europe, France and Spain particularly, may be looking with

* L'Hiſtoire des Indes, par Rainal.

pleaſure

pleaſure upon this rupture between Great Britain and her Colonies. But they ought to conſider, that the ſeeds of diviſion are ſown by nature in all political bodies; and that it requires only time and opportunity to make them ſpring. A very ſmall affair will occaſion dangerous convulſions, and ſometimes a total revolution in kingdoms. They ought to conſider too, that they may not derive all the advantages from this rupture they are apt to expect. Leagues and confederacies among ſtates are of a very uncertain ſtanding; and if ever they ſhould enter into a war with the Colonies of North America, which is very ſuppoſeable, it would be much more in their power to annoy them when diſjoined from the Mother Country, than when connected with her. The motions of North America, in the laſt caſe, depend upon thoſe of Great Britain, and theſe are ſuppoſed to be determined by a conſtant attention to the balance of power in Europe: but the Colonies of North America, in a ſtate of independency, could ſtrike a blow againſt either France or Spain, before they could make the leaſt motion for their defence. Therefore, in place of

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blowing the flame of diſcord, which may ſoon affect their own intereſt, they ought, by all means, to diſcourage rebellion and civil war.

Permit me now to turn my diſcourſe to the deſign of this day, by pointing out to you, in a few words, the improvement we ought to make of this ſubject.

I have obſerved above, that, amidſt all the advantages we of this nation enjoy above other nations, we are ungrateful and rebellious in the ſight of God: luxury and diſſipation, impiety and vice, are now become the characteriſtic of this age; ſo that we have the greateſt reaſon to conſider this war with our Colonies as a mark of God's diſpleaſure upon both them and ourſelves. Various have been the methods by which the Almighty has tried to reclaim us; and if our preſent dangerous ſituation proves inſufficient to do ſo, we have reaſon to fear that the meaſure of our iniquities is become full, and that we are a people ripe for deſtruction; and, in that caſe, that ſentence may go forth againſt us, as in verſe 5th, "Why "ſhould ye be ſtricken any more? ye will "revolt more and more: the whole head

"is

"is ſick, the whole heart is faint:"—A deſperate diſeaſe requires a deſperate remedy.

Let us therefore, my brethren, lift up our hearts with our hands to God, in humble gratitude to him for his long-ſuffering and patience toward us. When we conſider what all ranks have done to offend him, we may juſtly exclaim—"It is "of the Lord's mercy that we are not "conſumed:" that his holy indignation has not ere now made us monuments of his righteous diſpleaſure to all about us. Let us conſider what hath been the fate of other nations and churches in former times, and what muſt certainly be our own ere long, for the vindication of Divine Providence among mankind, unleſs a ſincere repentance, and a general reformation of manners, doth avert it.

The moſt proper way we can take to avert impending judgments, to preſerve and maintain our valuable privileges, and promote the public welfare and happineſs, is not to expreſs a clamorous zeal for liberty, at the ſame time that we abuſe it to an unreſtrained licentiouſneſs; than which nothing hath a greater tendency to deprive

us of our liberty; it muſt be ſo, both through the righteous judgment of God, and in the nature of the thing itſelf. But we muſt endeavour to make a juſt and wiſe improvement of our advantages; maintain a ſtrict regard to religion, probity, and purity of manners; and to guard againſt vice, libertiniſm, prophaneneſs, and debauchery; this, and this alone, will preſerve us a free, flouriſhing, and happy people. God grant that this may be the bleſſing of theſe nations to the lateſt poſterity; and that we may long enjoy the light of the glorious goſpel of Chriſt ſhining among us in its genuine purity, and the ineſtimable bleſſing of a freedom to profeſs it, and to worſhip God according to the dictates of his word, and of our own conſciences, and none to make us afraid.

Happy nations that we ſtill are, if we be but duly ſenſible of our happineſs, and careful to make a right uſe of our privileges! What a glorious face of things would ſoon appear among us, if, as we have the beſt religion in the world, we took care to act under the influence of its divine inſtructions and important motives! Virtue, ſupported and animated by the glorious hopes

of

of the goſpel, would appear in its genuine charms, and in its lovely excellence. Love, the true ſpirit of Chriſtianity, would prevail, and produce a mutual forbearance in leſſer differences, at the ſame time that there would be a happy agreement in matters of the higheſt importance; there would be a zeal without bigotry, a liberty without licentiouſneſs. Such would be the face of things among us, as far as could be expected in this ſtate of imperfection, if the religion of Jeſus was firmly believed, duly conſidered, and if men would be more generally perſuaded to give up themſelves to its divine conduct. This would render perſons in high ſtations ſignally uſeful to the public, and ornaments as well as ſupports to their country: and, at the ſame time, ſobriety, induſtry, temperance, and good order, would ſpread among the body of the people. Nor would true bravery and fortitude be wanting: for though ſuperſtition tendeth to produce mean and unmanly fears, true religion, and a ſteady belief of a wiſe and righteous Providence, hath a tendency to fortify and eſtabliſh the mind, and to produce a real courage and greatneſs

neſs of ſoul, which will enable a man to meet death with a calm intrepidity in a noble and juſt cauſe, and to ſtand the ſhock of the greateſt terrors.*

To conclude: The wiſdom of God aſſures us, and the experience of mankind in all ages confirms the truth of it, that "righteouſneſs exalteth a nation; but ſin is a reproach to any people." The beſt thing then that can be wiſhed for the honour of God, for the happineſs of mankind, and for the real welfare of our country, is, that a hearty zeal for the knowledge and practice of our holy religion may have a revival among us; and that perſons of all ranks and conditions may join in contributing to promote its ſacred intereſts: and, notwithſtanding the corruption too juſtly complained of, there are many, I hope, among us, and may the number daily increaſe, who are deſirous to do this. Every one has it in his power to contribute ſomething towards it, at leaſt by endeavouring to walk in a converſation becoming the goſpel. But there are ſome per-

* Steele's Chriſtian Hero.

ſons

ſons who have peculiar advantages for doing honour and ſervice to Chriſtianity. Thoſe eſpecially that are diſtinguiſhed by their high rank, their fortune, and quality, ſhould make uſe of the influence this gives them, to recommend and promote true religion and virtue: this will give a luſtre to their titles and dignities, and is one of the beſt ways they can take to ſhew their regard to the public happineſs. Magiſtrates ſhould account it their duty and their honour to employ the authority they are inveſted with, for ſerving the intereſts of religion, and diſcountenancing vice and wickedneſs; ſince for this purpoſe they are appointed, that they may be for the puniſhment of evil doers, and for the praiſe of them that do well. And it is then that their authority will have its proper influence, when it is ſtrengthened by that of their own good example. The miniſters of Jeſus Chriſt will make it the very buſineſs of their lives to ſpread and promote real, vital Chriſtianity, to inſtruct the people in its important doctrines, and build them up in their moſt holy faith, and to inforce upon them the excellent duties it enjoins,

joins, by all the powerful and moſt engaging motives which the goſpel ſets before us. And that our inſtructions may have the proper effect, they will be highly concerned to keep themſelves free from the faſhionable vices and follies of the age, and to endeavour to be enſamples to their flocks, by a well-tempered zeal, piety, and charity, and the virtues of a holy life. Thus will they not only do the higheſt ſervice to religion, but procure the greateſt honour to themſelves, and the moſt juſt veneration for their ſacred character, which, where it is not diſgraced by a conduct unworthy of it, naturally demandeth the eſteem and regard of all the true friends to religion and virtue. And when once we ſee this happy change upon the principles and manners of this age, we have reaſon to hope, that, notwithſtanding all we have done to offend God and bring his judgments upon us, he will return in mercy to us; that he will delight to dwell among us, and do us good; that he will bleſs the Britiſh empire, and continue it to be the habitation of divine truth, and of human liberty, to the lateſt ages.

For

For theſe valuable and excellent purpoſes, may the God of all grace pour forth his holy Spirit upon all orders and degrees of men in theſe nations; that, as they bear the honourable name of Chriſtians, they may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things; and, being filled with the knowledge of his will in all wiſdom and ſpiritual underſtanding, may walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleaſing, being fruitful in every good work.

FINIS.

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